



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXXVIII

NOVEMBER, 1911

NUMBER 5

Editorial

ETHICAL RELIGION

Religion is practically a universal element of human experience, but it is by no means uniform in its elements or character. If there is any tribe or individual who is without religion, these are abnormal exceptions to a rule all but universal. But the conceptions of religion which men have held are very many and the forms of its expression innumerable.

With some men and in some periods the dogmatic element has been the dominant one. Religion has been thought of mainly as right thinking. The supreme effort has been to frame a correct creed, and those who have believed themselves to have succeeded in this effort, or who have inherited a creed that seemed to them to embody the truth, have endeavored to force others to accept it, under penalty of suffering persecution of one kind or another.

In other periods and groups of men all emphasis has been laid upon rites and ceremonies. Men might believe what they pleased and live as they pleased. So long as they conformed to certain ceremonial requirements they were in good standing with their fellow-religionists. To be right with God or the gods was conceived to be dependent upon the offering of sacrifices, the recitation of prayers, or other like ritual performances.

Again, the emotional side of religion has received an emphasis which has thrown all other elements into the background. There have been times when the conviction that men could "get religion" only by a great emotional cataclysm has so dominated men's thought that those who counted themselves religious appealed to such a past experience as the chief evidence that they possessed

religion, and the stress of all religious work was on the production of such experience in others.

Still again, there have been times and places in which the future has filled so large a place in men's thought about religion that it has almost resolved itself into a sacrifice of all the goods of this life in order to secure the joy of the world beyond—a good bargain in which temporary wretchedness was the price of perpetual bliss.

These conceptions are, of course, not mutually exclusive. They may be combined in various proportions and relations. Nor are they wholly erroneous. Each of them has its element of truth. Religion must have its intellectual side. Right thinking is essential to the highest type of religion. All false religions and all the false elements of religion have in them an element of wrong thought and owe their falsity in no small measure to this wrong thought. For the great majority of people, rites and ceremonies are a necessary expression of their religion, and a necessary aid to its nourishment. No religion can flourish without emotion. The expressions of emotion are as various as the keys in which hymns are sung. Some natures are tuned to one key, and some to another, but in all religion emotion must play a part. Nor can religion ever lose sight of the future, or altogether eliminate the element of prudent self-interest and sacrifice of the present for the sake of the future.

The fault of all these conceptions is not, then, that they are intrinsically false, but that they are on the one hand partial and on the other hand not essentially ethical. Because of their incompleteness, each one of them, treated as the central element or unduly emphasized, becomes vicious and harmful. For if the experience of men has proved anything respecting religion, it is that if it fully serves its end as an element of human life, it must not concern itself exclusively with any part of life, but must permeate all life. It must be an attitude of the whole man, toward the whole of life. The truly religious man has found out how to relate every phase of his own nature toward life as a whole.

A recent writer has defined religion as the attempt of man so to adjust himself to the outer world upon which he has found himself dependent as to make it favorable to himself. That has

meant in most cases the attempt to win the favor of his god. But as human experience has grown constantly wider, it has become more and more evident that God is not a being whom we can isolate from our environment, so that we can turn toward him and away from the rest of our world and win his favor in proportion to our indifference to the rest of the world. God is in the world, in every part of it, concerned with its every part, and demands the allegiance of every power of the worshiper. The attitude that wins the divine favor is, therefore, not an attitude toward God as distinguished from the world, but an attitude toward the world which is God's. "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Religion that forgets the brother in the attempt to secure divine favor by worship fails of its own end.

But if experience condemns each of the views named above as partial and therefore ineffective, so also does it reject them because of their lack of ethical quality. As ethics without religion lacks depth and strength, so also does religion without ethics. But neither dogma, nor ritual, nor emotional cataclysm, nor prudent provision for the future are necessarily ethical. Religion achieves its full power as an elevating force in human nature only when taking in the whole nature of its subject it brings that subject into a truly moral relation to all related life.

Of course this is not to say anything new. It is but repeating the teaching that Jesus set forth when he taught men that true religion was to love the Lord God with the whole might, mind, and strength and one's neighbor as one's self. It merges ethics and religion by making religion an ethical attitude toward all sentient beings. It finds room for doctrine, ritual, emotion, and prudent self-interest, but unifies them all in a moral attitude of the whole nature to the whole environment, from the Almighty Father, supreme over all, to the lowest of his creatures.